

Lithuania to U.S.: Don't Sell Us Out

By PETER KERESZTES

VILNIUS, Lithuania—The final round of the so-called 4 + 2 talks on German unification is scheduled to get under way tomorrow in Moscow. After 45 years, the end of the postwar division of that nation and of Europe is at hand. Yet the fact that the session could set down some of the essential conditions for a long-delayed World War II peace treaty has alarmed the recently elected leaders of the Baltic states. They fear nothing less than a second Molotov-Ribbentrop sell-out.

The Council of the Baltic States, comprising the heads of the Baltic governments and parliaments, will hold a news conference in Moscow today at which it will express a "deep concern that the resolution of the German question may be held to be the final step in the liquidation of the consequences of World War II, and that the fate of the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of Lithuania will once again be decided without the knowledge of our Peoples." If that should happen, of course, the U.S. would be a party to it, as would Britain and France.

Vytautas Landsbergis, president of Lithuania's Supreme Council, told me in an interview a few days ago that from the point of view of the Baltic states, a formal reunification of Germany is by no means the end of the World War II story. "Three countries are still the victims of that war," Mr. Landsbergis asserts. "The Baltic countries have not regained their independence as promised in the Atlantic Charter."

Worried President

While he doesn't think the Moscow meeting is likely to produce a final peace treaty, Mr. Landsbergis fears agreements that might involve "the principle of not changing borders between Germany and Eastern countries, including the Soviet Union. If these statements would purport to fix the Soviet Union's borders, it would be a new Munich. It would not necessarily have to be recognition of the annexation—that would be inconceivable. But it could be done in some indirect way, and this is our problem."

Mr. Landsbergis worries that the U.S. in its desire to get Soviet cooperation in the Gulf crisis could overlook the interests of the Baltic states. In fact, he is concerned that Sunday's meeting between Presidents Bush and Gorbachev may have already prepared the ground for such a deal. The Balts take little comfort from the lukewarm support of the West for their sovereignty drives. They are sure of one thing only, that the Kremlin will try to derail their efforts.



Vytautas Landsbergis

The West's attitude nevertheless could be critical. Mr. Landsbergis believes that when Western governments sternly warned Mr. Gorbachev not to use force in his showdown with Lithuania earlier this year, they tipped the scale in the republic's favor. But Mr. Landsbergis doesn't disguise his disappointment that the West fails to use its leverage more.

"Western recognition of our governments and the establishment of diplomatic contacts is what we would prefer," he says. "That could worsen the West's diplomatic contacts with the Soviet Union a little. But we think that the West is too careful; too careful, not to risk any complications with the Soviets. They could push the Soviets back more strongly, because the

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Soviets are collapsing and are pulling back from all conquests and this pull-back could include the Baltics."

The Kremlin has called off its economic blockade, which had turned out to be at least seven times as costly for the Soviet Union as for Lithuania in ruble terms. But it has resorted to more subtle tactics to prevent Baltic independence. There is much evidence of attempts at delaying, distracting and dividing the states in their determined campaign for independence.

Lithuania agreed to defuse the crisis with the Kremlin by accepting a moratorium on its March 11 declaration of sovereignty, for example. But the moratorium was linked to the start of negotiations on sovereignty. A deadline for the talks has passed, and the Baltic states are waiting, perhaps in vain, for the Soviet side to respond to an initial protocol for negotiations delivered to the Kremlin a month ago. Amid growing opposition in the republics by those who fear that their leaders may accept less than full independence, the Baltic Council last week asked for a meeting between Baltic leaders and Mr. Gorbachev.

Overt blackmail is again part of the Soviet strategy. "They are threatening us," Mr. Landsbergis says. "Either we accept the central government's proposals on a union treaty or we can look forward to a winter without supplies of energy and fuel." The proposed treaty, which is purported to make secession possible, is really a trap in that it sets obstacles in the way of secession; the only way to escape the trap

is not to sign the treaty at all. That, according to Lithuanian parliamentarians, is the intention of the Baltic states.

The Kremlin's economic blackmail is combined with some apparently artificial shortages of consumer products. Gasoline supplies are spotty. Sugar is limited to one kilo a month per person, soap to one cake and wine to one liter. Such products, made and distributed by the state, are turning up on black markets at sharply higher prices.

The KGB and Moscow have attempted to establish alternative government institutions in Lithuania, Mr. Landsbergis says, "especially at the prosecutorial level. But they don't succeed. The so-called general prosecutor sent by Moscow is entirely isolated. And, Moscow's attempt to present the Lithuanian Communist Party as a real political force is simply not serious—without monetary and political support from Moscow it would just disappear."

"The KGB and central institutions are very much interested in destabilizing the situation in Lithuania," Mr. Landsbergis believes. "They are trying to sharpen national differences among the Baltic peoples and among Russians, Poles and Ukrainians. The official press and radio broadcasts from military bases disseminate much disinformation." They are not so successful here as they have been in areas such as the South Central republics, he says, and the new governments have much support among non-Baltic residents.

As examples of disinformation, Mr. Landsbergis shows newspaper clippings that paint even czarist Russia as having been kind to non-Russian peoples in the empire, without a trace of attempts at Russification in the Baltics. But even young Lithuanians know better. A 21-year-old cites an infamous and failed attempt in czarist times to force the use of the Cyrillic alphabet in Lithuanian literature. All recognize the cynicism of communists who turned a Vilnius Roman Catholic church into a museum for atheism while they allowed the communist-controlled Russian Orthodox Church to build new churches.

Family History

Cultures seldom succumb to persecution; indeed, they are often fortified by the attempt. Lithuanian partisans were the last to give up armed resistance to Stalin's domination, fighting into the 1950s. The family history of almost every living Lithuanian includes imprisonment, deportation or murder at the hands of communists.

Balts are not asking the West to do their fighting for them today, either. They are simply demanding that the World War II Allies cut no deals over their heads. As the Baltic Council's statement argues, the fate of the three republics "is not an internal matter of the U.S.S.R."

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